

Book Review: Remapping India: New States and their Political Origins by Louise Tillin

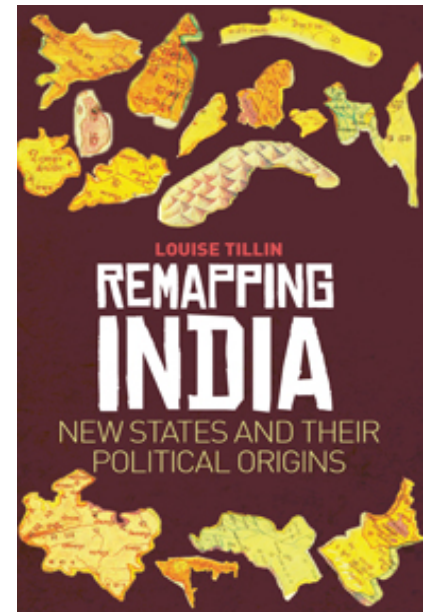
blogs.lse.ac.uk/lsereviewofbooks/2014/01/14/book-review-remapping-india-new-states-and-their-political-origins-by-louise-tillin/

*This book looks at the most recent episode of state creation in 2000, when the states of Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Uttarakhand came into being in some of the poorest, yet resource-rich, regions of Hindi-speaking north and central India. Their creation represented a new turn in the history of the country's territorial organisation. In this book **Louis Tillin** sets out to explain the politics that lay behind this episode of 'post-linguistic' state reorganisation and what it means for the future design of India's federal system. Reviewed by **Oliver Godsmark**.*



Remapping India: New States and their Political Origins. Louise Tillin. C. Hurst & Co. October 2013.

Find the book:





As recently as October 2013, the Government of India endorsed plans to bifurcate the primarily Telugu-speaking state of Andhra Pradesh, as part of the process whereby India's 29th state of [Telangana](#) would be created. The recognition accorded to Telangana was particularly significant, as Andhra, when initially created in 1953, had been the first state to be formed in independent India on the basis of linguistic homogeneity. Support for Telangana is thus representative of a broader trend over the last few decades within India, in which the former esteem for the linguistic principle seems to have been gradually marginalised. [Louise Tillin](#)'s highly readable and well researched book looks to provide an explanation for this shift in emphasis by focusing upon the creation of the states of Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Uttarakhand within the 'Hindi-speaking heartland of north India in 2000. Unlike much of the somewhat limited existing literature on these instances of 'post-linguistic states reorganisation, *Remapping India* offers an original premise by suggesting that the calls for these states emerged out of 'longer term changes in local structures of power and the relations between social groups' (p. 5). Rather than focusing solely upon sociological or political economy explanations for reorganisation, the author treats internal borders within a federal system as a form of institution, vital 'in determining which groups are in competition with each other over the distribution of which resources' (p. 21). Borders become 'sticky' (and episodes of reorganisation are thus rather sporadic) precisely because they provide advantageous circumstances for particular elites within these states. Yet, for Tillin, such institutionalisation does not preclude processes of change, whereby the stability of existing borders can be ultimately undermined. In particular, she identifies three shifting socio-political dynamics over the preceding three decades, which account for the moment of state creation in 2000.

First, *Remapping India* highlights how new social movements helped precipitate the decline in the Indian National Congress Party's 'system' of 'one-party dominance' from the early 1970s onwards. Second, it demonstrates how this coincided, especially after 1980, with the emergence of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) as a national party capable of challenging the Congress's erstwhile political hegemony. Chapter Three, in particular, successfully weaves these narratives together to provide a rich understanding of the demands for statehood in Jharkhand and Uttarakhand. The movement for a separate Jharkhand, Tillin argues, was reinvigorated during this period by responses to the efforts of the Congress to co-opt within its

organisation less radical elements of the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha social movement, and by backing the demand for statehood received from the BJP as they sought increased political support and power in the region's electoral sphere. These 'interactions between social movement actors, political parties and the state helped to produce a focus on statehood that functioned as a lowest common denominator among actors with divergent interests' (p. 68).



Credit: [Martin Solli](#) . CC BY-NC-SA 2.0

Perhaps the most insightful aspect of the book, however, is elucidated in Chapter Five. Here, the author delineates the linkages between the demands for statehood and her third shifting socio-political dynamic, that of growing low caste assertion in India's 'Hindi-speaking' heartland. The implementation of affirmative action for 'Other Backward Classes' in the bureaucracy and educational institutions brought new parties ascribing to a social justice agenda to the forefront of politics in the early 1990s which, for Tillin, 'changed state-level political arenas in north India' (p. 151). *Remapping India* highlights how this new political context created difficulties for those politicians looking to construct 'stable, state-wide political coalitions based on lower caste political identities' (pp. 151-152) amongst class differentiated and spatially disaggregated low caste groups. As a result, the efficacy of the existing state borders in the north was not only being challenged by those in the regions demanding separate statehood, but by those in power at the state level.

For Tillin, the decline in upper caste dominance in north India explains 'why it was in the Hindi belt, and not in linguistic state in south or west India, that the new states were created in 2000' (p. 145). This instance of states reorganisation thus in part reflects earlier antecedents from further south in the Indian subcontinent, where the growing prominence of low and middle caste groups during the colonial interwar period was linked to the creation of new states such as Andhra Pradesh in the immediate decades after independence. However, these parts of the subcontinent are simultaneously distinguished from the north by the author, who reasons that '[i]t is also the case that the affective ties of language that ... had come to be experienced as natural in the early part of the twentieth century in southern India ... were absent as ingredients for the formation of regional political community in northern India, at least within individual states' (p. 147).

It is at this juncture, perhaps, that the book is thus open to some criticism. Partly as a product of circumstance, the reader might ask whether the theories that underpin the north-south divide Tillin delineates are potentially problematic, in light of the recent governmental decision regarding Telangana. Equally, however, we might sense in the (often violent) reaction to this proposal amongst residents of coastal Andhra Pradesh, the unlikelihood of Telangana's creation. In part, therefore, the efficacy of this fragment of the author's thesis rests on impending developments within India's federal system.

Meanwhile, rather than treating the inhabitants of northern India as a Hindi-speaking *staatsvolk*, *Remapping India* might also have delved into how such languages as Chhattisgarhi in Chhattisgarh, Magahi and Maithili in Jharkhand, and Garhwali and

Kumaoni in Uttarakhand have been frequently treated by the state as simply dialects of Hindi. Might the existence of these various mother-tongues also help explain the difficulties in creating any sense of social cohesiveness in the states of Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh? Despite these slightly trivial shortcomings, Tillin has written an exceptionally astute text, full of theoretical and empirical detail and longer-term historical insights into why states reorganisation occurred in northern India in 2000 – it should thus serve as one of the essential texts on federal restructuring within South Asia, and other federal systems further afield, for years to come.

Oliver Godsmark is a Lecturer in Modern History in the Department of Politics, History and International Relations at Loughborough University, where he teaches modern South Asian history from 1750 to the present day. He has also previously taught at the University of Leeds and the London School of Economics and Political Science. His current research interests consider the implications of independence, partition, and the linguistic reorganisation of state administrative boundaries upon notions and experiences of citizenship amongst South Asians during the 1940s and 1950s. [Read more reviews by Oliver.](#)